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## **2004 USA Formula Renault 2000 Winter Invitational Sebring International Raceway Report**



Lebanese racing driver Basil Shaaban, driving with CT Motorsport and supported by Major Sponsor BRICC, Media Marketing partner Beirut Times, and Marketing Graphics partner Harb Designs, made his formula racing debut on January 23 and 24. Basil's debut was in the first two races of the 2004 USA Formula Renault 2000 Winter Championship that were held at Sebring International Raceway in Sebring, Florida. The championship includes 24 drivers from 15 countries with Basil as the only Arab competitor. The two-day event consisted of a qualification and race on each of the two days, and was a fantastic feeling for Basil after his years of training and racing in go-karts. With his talent and determination he was able to overcome adversity each day to finish both races in the top 15.

The first day in qualifying, Basil suffered a fracture in his engine's oil-pan on an exit kerb early in the session. The CT Motorsport mechanics worked very hard to replace the oil-pan in time for the race, but just missed the cut-off so Basil had to start the race from the pit-lane. Once all his competitors began the race, he was released from pit-lane by the officials to join the race from the back: 24th place. At the end of the thirty minute race, after several overtaking maneuvers and well-judged evasions from other competitors' accidents, Basil crossed the finish-line in 14th place. It was a very promising come-back from an unlucky qualifying and showed his and the team's sheer determination in the face of adversity.

In the second day's qualification more problems ensued as the team took the gamble of running the car with an experimental brake pad which proved to be too sensitive to temperature and brake pressure. In most braking zones the brake pad caused sudden wheel-locking that quickly deteriorated and damaged Basil's front tires. This made it impossible for him to run a good lap, forcing him to retire early from the session. His fastest lap put him only on the 20th starting position. Undeterred, at the race-start Basil got a good launch and began fighting his way through the field. Even with the worn replacement front tires allowed by the rules, Basil pushed hard, made several tough passes and finished in 15th place.

Basil said this about his formula debut, "Even though we had a fair share of mechanical misfortunes this weekend, it is great to start a career off with a challenge and see yourself make the best of it. In that way it was a success and I can't wait for the next race where I hope for a smoother ride!" His perseverance and ability to drive fast and overtake his more experienced competitors inspired the team and brought positive attention to the Lebanese formula driver. Basil is returning to California to continue testing in the Formula Renault 2000 car, and is optimistic for the last three races of the Winter Championship to be held at Homestead-Miami Speedway on February 14, 15 & 17.